

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 6, 2021

The Honorable Thomas Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Carrie Castille
Director, National Institute of Food and Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack and Director Castille,

We write to you regarding the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentives Program (GusNIP) Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 Request for Applications (RFA). We deeply appreciate NIFA's communication with our state and their recent amendment to the RFA. However, we write to highlight additional changes that we believe will preserve our state's ability to participate in this essential program.

On Page 44 of the RFA, it states that "51% of the total grant funds should be budgeted to and spent on incentives." In addition, it defines "total grant funds" as "Federal + match," a significant change from the previous 2018 RFA. While we appreciate the Department's focus on providing as many dollars to incentives as possible, complying with this provision will be very difficult for our state and its partners – possibly ultimately resulting in terminating their participation in GusNIP. Connecticut, which currently has a GusNIP grant with Rhode Island, Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine, will either severely scale back their SNAP doubling programs or discontinue them altogether under the current conditions. Given the recovery from the pandemic will take time, scaling back this critical support system for families would be severely detrimental to the health of our communities.

Connecticut and its state partners have been operating under a grant from NIFA's FY 2018 RFA under GusNIP (at that time, known as the Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) program). In that RFA, incentive requirements only applied to federal dollars, not state match dollars. While this change seems small, it has a large effect on the economic realities of our program which works with small markets and heavily relies on in-kind contributions to meet state match requirements.

With this change, our state program directors would have to raise considerable sums of money – in Connecticut the estimate is over \$55,000 per year - to keep the program operational at the same level. With the additional stress and workload that have befallen our nutrition leaders due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the time and resources needed to undertake such a fundraising endeavor are simply not available.

We sincerely urge you to provide flexibility for Connecticut and its state partners during the pandemic to allow the existing incentive program to continue without the 51% incentive requirement applying to both federal funds and the state match. We would encourage finding a way to support states that are under increased financial strain due to the new requirement, especially during the pandemic. Awarding the current COVID-19 response funding to states in addition to a no-cost one-year extension to give time for the language to be revised for the FY 2020 RFA, or revisiting the matching requirement for incentives in the FY 2021 RFA for the GusNIP program, are two options that could be pursued by USDA. With the current RFA due on April 15, time is of the essence.

Should there be any way that Congress can be of assistance in this endeavor, please reach out to our offices so that we may collaborate on a solution. We sincerely appreciate your attention to this matter and your continued work to ensure that all families have access to nutritious meals during the COVID-19 pandemic.

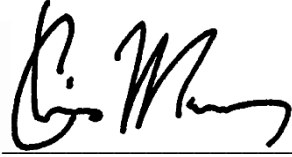
Sincerely,

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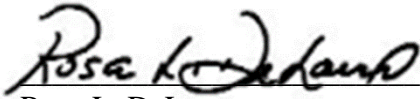
Jahana Hayes
Member of Congress

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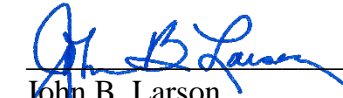
Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

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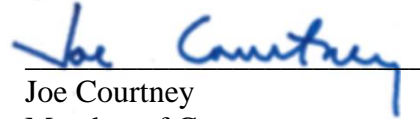
Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator

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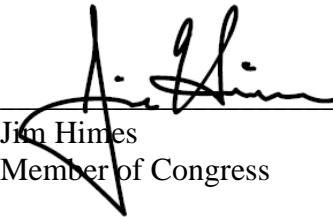
Rosa L. DeLauro
Member of Congress

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John B. Larson
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Joe Courtney", written over a horizontal line.

Joe Courtney
Member of Congress

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Jim Himes
Member of Congress